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\section{1. Subject and source}

*Dovyalis caffra* (Hook. f. & Harv.) Sim [syn. *Aberia caffra* Hook. f. & Harv.] (Salicaceae) is commonly known as kei apple (Palgrave, 1991). It is found in the eastern parts of southern Africa, and is a shrub or a small tree with edible fruits. The roots and thorns are used in African traditional medicine to treat amenorrhea and chest pain (Cumes et al., 2008), and *D. caffra* and other *Dovyalis* species are used by the Zulu to treat pain in rheumatic fever and rheumatism (Bryant, 1966). Twigs and leaves were collected in September 2008 at the University of KwaZulu-Natal Botanical Garden (S29°37′E30°24′), South Africa. A voucher specimen (accession number: Stafford 362 NU) has been deposited in the Herbarium at University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg (NU Herbarium). *D. zeyheri* Warb. [syn. *Aberia zeyheri* Sond.] (Salicaceae) is commonly known as wild apricot due to its edible fruits, and is a small to medium-sized tree found in the same regions as *D. caffra*. Leaves as well as stem bark were collected in August 2008 at the University of KwaZulu-Natal Botanical Garden (S29°37′E30°24′), South Africa, and a voucher specimen (accession number: Stafford 361 NU) has been deposited in the above-mentioned herbarium.

\section{2. Previous work}

There is no literature report of phytochemical investigations of *D. zeyheri*. Fruits of *D. caffra* have been investigated for their composition of pectin and amino acids (Abdel-Fattah et al., 1975), and for the antioxidant activity of the polyphenols present...
in the fruit juice (Loots et al., 2006). Leaves of D. caffra have been investigated for their content of tannins (Saleh et al., 1969), and the extracts of fruits, leaves, stems, and roots have shown antibacterial activity (Basile et al., 1997; Zaki, 1975). Although alkaloids are generally uncommon in Salicaceae, two alkaloids have been identified in D. caffra (i.e. A. caffra) by Sayed et al. (2000), and a series of novel spermidine-alkaloids were recently isolated from Dovyalis macrocalyx, Dovyalis hebecarpa, and Dovyalis abyssinica (Staerk et al., 2003; Rasmussen et al., 2006).

3. Present study

Dried and ground plant material of D. caffra (twigs and leaves, 477 g) and D. zeyheri (stem bark, 213 g and leaves, 120 g) were successively extracted with a 1:1 mixture of dichloromethane and methanol (4 × 650 ml D. caffra, 5 × 540 ml D. zeyheri stem bark, and 4 × 400 ml D. zeyheri leaves) and pure methanol (2 × 900 ml D. caffra and 3 × 750 ml D. zeyheri stem bark). The combined extracts were dried in vacuo and the residues (57 g D. caffra, 16 g D. zeyheri stem bark, and 17 g D. zeyheri leaves) were dissolved in a 9:1 mixture of methanol and water and defatted with light petroleum to afford 35 g, 14 g, and 15 g defatted extract, respectively. The defatted extract from D. caffra was dissolved in 300 ml of water and extracted with 3 × 100 ml dichloromethane and followed by extraction with 3 × 100 ml ethyl acetate. During this procedure 390 mg of precipitate was obtained, which was identified as 4-hydroxytremulacin (1) (Fig. 1) by comparison of 1H and 13C NMR data with data from the literature (Rasmussen et al., 2006). Half (2.25 g) of the ethyl acetate fraction (4.5 g) was subjected to vacuum liquid chromatography (16 × 4 cm i.d. column, Merck silica gel 60 (15–40 μm), eluted with step-gradients of 5, 10, and 20% methanol in dichloromethane) to afford four fractions (VLC1A-VLC1D), of which fraction VLC1A (eluted with 500 ml 5% methanol and 0.6 mg/g of dry plant material (0.06% w/w) for 1 and 3 mg/g (0.3% w/w) for 2.

The defatted extract of D. zeyheri stem bark was partitioned between water, dichloromethane, and ethyl acetate as described above, and the ethyl acetate fraction (1.68 g) was subjected to vacuum liquid chromatography (16 × 4 cm i.d. column, Merck silica gel 60 (15–40 μm) eluted with step-gradients of 5, 10, and 20% methanol in dichloromethane) to afford six fractions (VLC2A-VLC2F). Fraction VLC2E (700 mg) was identified as itoside A (2), by comparison of 1H and 13C NMR data with data from the literature (Chai et al., 2007). The isolated material corresponds to 0.6 mg/g of dry plant material (0.06% w/w) for 1 and 3 mg/g (0.3% w/w) for 2.

A portion (1.5 mg) of the defatted extract of D. zeyheri leaves was separated at 40 °C by RP-HPLC (150 × 4.6 mm i.d. Phenomenex C18(2) Luna column (3 μm, 100 Å)), using isocratic elution (water-methanol 11:9 + 0.1% formic acid) with a flow rate of 0.8 ml/min. Collection of one peak (tR 3.9 min) afforded 1.2 mg of material that was identified as itoside A (2). The isolated material corresponds to 2.7 mg/g of dry plant material (0.06% w/w) for 1 and 0.4 mg/g (0.04% w/w) for 2.

Fig. 1. Chemical structures of compounds 1-2.

4. Chemotaxonomic importance

The genus Dovyalis has traditionally been placed in the family Flacourtiaeae, which has long been recognized as a polyphyletic taxon, having a highly diverse and controversial circumscription (Chase et al., 2002). However, the cyanogenic tribes of Flacourtiaeae were recently included in the family Achariaceae, and the noncyanogenic tribes, including Dovyalis, were united with Salicaceae (APG II, 2003). Phenolic glycosides such as tremulacin, salicortin (a debenzoyl derivative of
tremulacin), salicin, and their derivatives are known to be characteristic markers of many Salicaceous species (Nyman and Julkunen-Tiitto, 2005), and may be of common occurrence in the extended Salicaceae (Leskinen and Alström-Rapaport, 1999). An interesting common feature of the redefined Salicaceae is that many of the species included are host plants for the same genera of specialist butterflies (Nandi et al., 1998). The clue for this preference may very likely be the common occurrence of salicin derivatives. In this work, 4-hydroxytremulacin (1) was identified as a major constituent of both D. caffra and D. zeyheri. Until now 1 has only been identified in two genera within Salicaceae, i.e., Dovyalis [D. abyssinica and D. hebecarpa (Rasmussen et al., 2006)] and Itoa [Itoa orientalis (Chai et al., 2007, 2008)]. Compounds with 4-hydroxysalicin (= salirepin) as the core skeleton are frequently found in Salicaceae, but there have also been a few reports of these compounds in Achariaceae, Symplocaceae, Liliaceae, and Hypoxidaceae (see Supplementary data). Interestingly, however, is the fact that salirepin analogues with the 1-hydroxy-6-oxocyclohex-2-enecaboxylate moiety at C-7 are restricted to Salicaceae, and they should therefore be considered important Salicaceous chemical markers (see Supplementary data). A salirepin analogue with a related 1,2,6-trihydroxy-5-oxocyclohex-3-enecaboxylate moiety has been reported from Homalium longifolium (Shaari and Waterman, 1995) and has more recently been identified in stems of Scolopia braunii by Mosaddik et al. (2007). Both species belong to Salicaceae. Itoiside A (2) is a 2-benzoyl analogue of salirepin, but due to the appearance of salirepin analogues outside Salicaceae, this compound is not a unique Salicaceous chemical marker. However, as a possible precursor of 1 its presence is an important finding, and the occurrence of both phenolic glycosides 1 and 2 in D. caffra and D. zeyheri supports the inclusion of these species in the extended Salicaceae. The spermidine-alkaloids found in D. macrocalyx, D. hebecarpa, and D. abyssinica (Staerk et al., 2003; Rasmussen et al., 2006) were neither identified in D. caffra or D. zeyheri, and the unusual occurrence of these rare alkaloids in Salicaceae continues therefore to be an interesting chemotaxonomic aspect of Dovyalis systematics worth further investigations.

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Appendix. Supplementary data


References